

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A3NEW YORK TIMES  
28 April 1987

# Defiant British Paper Tells Spy Story

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Special to The New York Times

LONDON, April 27 — In an unusual challenge to the Government, a British newspaper ignored a court ban today and published details of a book asserting that British intelligence agents plotted against Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

The Government quickly took up the challenge from the newspaper, *The Independent*, and announced that it would seek a contempt-of-court judgment to stop further publication of accusations from the memoirs of Peter Wright, a retired British spy whom the Government has sought to silence.

The *Independent*, calling for parliamentary oversight of Britain's intelligence services, devoted its front page to three articles on the memoirs. The book charges that a group of about 30 British agents spied on, conspired against and defamed Prime Minister Wilson, who served three terms as Prime Minister between 1964 and 1976, because they disliked his visits to the Soviet Union and considered him untrustworthy.

The memoirs, called "Spycatcher," have been examined and debated for months in the courts in Australia, where the Thatcher Government has mounted a thus far unsuccessful challenge to prevent publication.

## Secrecy Called Endemic

Two other London newspapers, *The Evening Standard* and *The Daily News*, followed *The Independent's* lead in publishing details and also faced the Government's contempt of court challenge.

"We have endemic secrecy here," said Andreas Whittam Smith, editor of *The Independent*, which was founded last fall. He said it was "ludicrous" that Parliament and the public had been denied information that has been easily accessible to the rest of the world.

In conjunction with the court fight in Australia, the Thatcher Government obtained a British court ruling last July that generally enjoined the press from reporting Mr. Wright's charges to British citizens by way of correspondents covering the Australian court fight. That wider ruling grew out of the Government's invoking national secrecy and acting against two other newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, which had initially published details of Mr. Wright's charges about agents of M.I.5, the Government Secret Service.

Mr. Whittam Smith maintained in an interview that no such general ban could be binding on Fleet Street and that he was free to publish since there was no specific injunction against his newspaper.

## Secrecy Laws Are Extensive

The British Government uses extensive secrecy laws to exercise some of the most far-reaching powers over the press in the Western world. Critics have complained that successive Prime Ministers protect their predecessors from late emerging accusations, in effect, by staunchly defending their own prerogatives under the official secrets act.

At the same time, the British public is treated to an endless, confusing array of articles in the newspapers rooted in rumors of double-agent "moles" and compromising homosexuality in the highest levels of the intelligence services.

The precise truth of these articles and the extent of possible official damage often is never clearly ascertained, in part because Britain has no constitution for providing the extensive investigation powers akin to those of the United States Congress. Amid the latest such rumor barrage, Prime Minister Thatcher confirmed last week that Sir Maurice Oldfield, the late director of M.I.6, another intelligence agency, was a homosexual, but she offered no other details.

Mr. Wright charges that M.I.5, which specializes in counterintelligence, was penetrated by Soviet agents — a scandal well known now for years — and

that it also regularly engaged in unlawful activities inside Britain. Most of the charges have long since been published, although often left unverified, and that fact was part of Mr. Wright's defense.

The Government accuses Mr. Wright of violating his promise as a British agent not to disclose the inner workings of M.I.5, where he served as a high-ranking official until retirement in 1976.